

# RICHARD CROKER

## WITH DESPOT'S ROD

Fought Way With Fists  
and Brains to Gain Con-  
trol of Tammany.

DEFEATED ONLY TWICE

Dared Defy Tweed as Ward  
Leader, but Brooked No  
Defiance Himself.

RETIRED TO IRISH HOME

Then Devoted Life to Horses  
and Cattle and Forged New  
York Politics.

Richard Croker was the leader of Tammany Hall when that position carried with it virtually the political mastery of New York city. A politician of uncommon sagacity and keenness, he united the warring elements in Tammany and ruled it with a more absolute sway than it had ever known under his predecessors—"Bill" Tweed and John Kelly.

Croker's rule over Tammany lasted seventeen years, counting in the brief period when, with Croker abroad, John C. Sheehan was its titular head. In those seventeen years Croker suffered only two defeats in the city—the election of William L. Strong in 1894 and that of Seth Low in 1901. The fealty Croker demanded from his followers and the discipline he enforced on those he put on Tammany tickets has made that period unique in New York politics.

The leader of the Hall in those years was frequently referred to as "New York's uncrowned king." His career, so far as New York politics were concerned, ended characteristically and dramatically in 1902 with an abdication that evoked tears from the Tammany followers. Since then he had lived the life of an Irish gentleman, wrapped up in his horses and his blooded cattle, and as far removed from American politics as anybody could very well be.

"Followers His Slaves." "Dick Croker is the noblest work of God—an honest man," said his predecessor, John Kelly, just before his death, and most of Croker's followers agreed with this and on the occasion of his leave takings insisted that he was the greatest leader Tammany ever had. A man whose very name was anathema to the reform elements in this city for years and who was the incarnation of political unrighteousness, he evoked in consequence an almost slavish loyalty from a large part of New York's population.

To many whose memories still stretch back to the time when Croker ruled New York he was the very ideal of a political leader. Taciturn, spinsterlike and cold at times as the poet for audacity, with a political sagacity almost uncanny to his followers, he knew how to reward and enrich the faithful with the spoils of victory and to punish the least infractions of his commands. He alone was the slatemaker in those days and the dictator of appointments. His power was no better evidenced than in the scene which followed the election of Van Wyck as Mayor. It was Croker, and not the Mayor elect, who was followed by a horde of hotel corridors by the horde of applicants for office brought there by the greatest victory in Croker's career.

Justice Daily Defted Him. It was the disciplinary system instituted by Croker that in part was responsible for his success in making Tammany powerful after a record of disorganization, and this same system brought down on Croker's head some of the worst storms of his career. It led to murmurs and an outburst when he was followed by a horde of hotel corridors by the horde of applicants for office brought there by the greatest victory in Croker's career.

With the stubbornness for which he was famous Croker, on his refusal, turned Judge Day's demand for a renomination, though it meant facing a new election, and made Theodore Roosevelt Governor.

Physical prowess and courage were responsible chiefly for the early rise of young Croker, the son of an Irish emigrant, from the level of the East Side political gangs. He had a hard flat nose, which many attributed to him. On the contrary, Croker's father, Eyre Croker, came of a family which for six generations had owned their own land in Ireland and was, as things went there, of the gentry. His ancestors had included officers of rank in the English army and even a member of Parliament.

Richard Croker was the youngest of seven children and was born on November 24, 1843, in the village of Castletown-roche, Cork. Four years afterward the Croker family, feeling the effect of a school in East Twenty-seventh street, came to this country. The Croker brood were all packed in a sailing ship, passed through Castle Garden, the Ellis Island of those days, and went to live in a little house on the Bloomingdale Road. Here they remained for some years until the father moved them downtown and put his son Richard in a school in East Twenty-seventh street. Richard Croker—his seldom used middle name of Welstead—got his only schooling there. At 15 he went to work in the machine shops of the New York Central.

The East Side of New York was then in the grip of several gangs. One of them was the Fourth Avenue Tunnel gang. By winning most of the local celebrities of the day, Croker, while still a lad, had lifted himself from a neighborhood obscurity to a position of some fame in the eyes of the

## Former Tammany Chief Dead in Ireland

Croker's Death Is Kept From O'Brien on Birthday

REPORTERS went last night to the home of Morgan J. O'Brien at 729 Park avenue to ask him what he had to say about the death of Richard Croker, whose close friend he was. They were met by Mrs. O'Brien. She said that Judge O'Brien was celebrating his seventieth birthday and that he had not been told of Mr. Croker's death. Only members of the family and a few friends were at the dinner.

"We have kept the news from him," explained Mrs. O'Brien. "He will not know of Mr. Croker's death until he reads the Sunday papers—and then it will be too late to spoil the birthday party we have arranged for him."

A dollar dinner was held at the Metropolitan House. It was attended by more than 1,000 and was supposed to set a record for sumptuous banquets. At this feast Croker received the homage of all those whom he had set once more on the road to wealth and public emoluments.

This memorable feast occurred in 1896. The Mazet committee was even then conducting its investigations into Tammany's rule of the city. The very next day Croker took the stand and defiantly answered the questions of Frank Moss on his methods of ruling Tammany and his own private business.

Admitted Selfish Ends. It was on the stand that day that Croker delivered his famous utterance about working for his own pocket. Asked if he had not obtained the nomination of men who would see that he and his partner, Peter F. Meyer, then in the real estate business, would not want for profits, Croker said that he expected to be permitted to make a living.

"Then you are working for your own pocket," Frank Moss thrust at him. "All the time, every day in the week, just the same as you are," retorted Croker, and the Tammanyites present yelled.

Croker's one essay in State politics met with disaster. Departing from the traditional theory of Tammany since the days of John Jay, when his predecessor had bolted a State ticket and thereafter declared he would let the State alone, Croker in 1892, over the opposition of the Tammanyites, supported the nomination of Hugh McLaughlin for Governor against Roosevelt. The cry went up, "Van Wyck, Van Wyck & Co." Roosevelt won by 50,000. Croker lost the county seat and his candidate for Justice, David Leventritt, whom he had nominated in place of Justice Day.

Croker followed this victory by another two years later, electing Thomas F. Gilroy, Tammany Grand Sachem, as Mayor by a plurality of 75,000. It was in this election that the record was made in one election district of only four votes cast against Croker's ticket.

Opposed Cleveland in 1892. Croker, intrenched in his dictatorship, opposed the nomination of Grover Cleveland in 1892. New York's candidate being David B. Hill. But Croker did not like Hill, and by many his opposition to Cleveland was believed to have been a rather forced one. The entire New York delegation, however, signed the famous proclamation declaring that if Cleveland were renominated the State of New York would be lost.

In the convention Bourke Cockran, then hand and glove with Croker, delivered his philippic against the renomination of Cleveland. He declared that he would not follow the lead of the Tammanyites, and in 1893, with Kelly's support, was nominated as a candidate for Congress. He won in fees \$15,000 a year.

At this time occurred the most painful incident of Croker's life, from the unfortunate shadow of which he never could entirely escape—the murder of John McKenna. McKenna was a follower of James O'Brien, Croker's rival in the factional fighting in the Eighteenth district. In the campaign of 1874 O'Brien was defeated by Croker. McKenna was in opposition to Abram S. Hewitt, whom Croker was supporting.

The jury in this famous case—six Republicans and six Democrats—disagreed all the way, the case being never settled. McKenna was a follower of James O'Brien, Croker's rival in the factional fighting in the Eighteenth district. In the campaign of 1874 O'Brien was defeated by Croker. McKenna was in opposition to Abram S. Hewitt, whom Croker was supporting.

By his enemies it was charged to a lack of courage, the charge being that he was afraid to face the inevitable defeat. His friends, however, have always insisted that Croker, then, was actuated entirely by a desire to get away from the burdens of leadership and race his horses.

The Lexow investigation occurred that year, but Croker was not put on the stand. He returned from Europe ready to testify, he said, but he did not assume the actual reins of leadership. Tammany, in consequence, floundered in its history, managed by a committee consisting of Thomas F. Gilroy, James J. Martin and Henry D. Purroy. The victory of Mayor Strong by 45,000 completed the disorganization of the party.

With the characteristic patience, Croker waited until the party was back on its feet. On June 4, 1907, occurred the triumph of his racing career. He won the Kentucky Derby, and he retained Croker's stable in Ireland, coming home two and a half lengths in the lead. "Hail the Irish flag," Croker telegraphed home to Glencliff and there was great jubilation in Ireland.

Life Helped Him in Early Days. Croker was married twice. His first wife was a Miss Margaret Prazler, whom he married when he was a mere boy. She died when he was 19. He married her influence on him was very marked. Indeed, the first Mrs. Croker, who came of a well-to-do family, was a political leader in her own right.

Returned From Ireland in 1897. The return from Elba, one of the most astonishing political events of Mr. Croker's life, occurred in 1897. He returned in the summer of 1897, after Sheehan had borne the onus of the disastrous Bryan campaign, characterized by Tammany's weakhearted support of the Peckless Leader. Disillusioned still after his return, Croker resumed the leadership, Croker suddenly in the fall sent for Sheehan and told him to take a back seat. "The Boss has come back," was the joyful cry of the faithful.

At a meeting of the leaders Sheehan was deposed and Croker elevated to his old place at the top of Tammany. Croker died and the nomination of Robert A. Van Wyck and won the first election for Mayor in Greater New York on a wide open ticket. Tammany was elected, the first straight out Tammany man the city had had in a generation.

It was the most notable triumph of his life. Croker, enthroned once more, with the accompaniment of the faithful inging in his ears, opened his court at Lakewood, following the election. It was there that all the Tammanyites repaired and Croker paraded out the patronage, no more attention being paid to Mayor-elect Van Wyck than if he had been a jellyfish.

Rule of City Through Van Wyck. The four years of the Van Wyck administration marked the culmination of Croker's political career and was the most picturesque period in the life of the old Tammany boss. No political leader in America ever was so feted, flattered, courted and caressed as Croker was in the days when he held his levees at the Metropolitan Club. Every body of any importance in the city administration struggled to get his ear and to be one of his favored courtiers.

As if to mark his coronation, a con-

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Tammany Chief and His Indian Wife Vindicated in Action So Far Terminated—Father and Richard, Jr., Split in 1917 Over Latter's Rights.

Richard Croker, Says Nathan Straus.

The last years of Richard Croker's life were embittered by alienation from his children, who conducted a long series of legal actions against him. The estrangement dated from Mr. Croker's marriage to his second wife, Billie, who represented herself as of American Indian stock.

His sons and daughters, in March, 1919, obtained from the court in West Palm Beach, Fla., an injunction restraining the old chieftain "from further dissipating his estate." In the supporting papers it was alleged that he was mentally unsound and incompetent to handle his extensive affairs and that he was being unduly influenced by his second wife, who by means of gifts and deeds, was rapidly taking possession of the major part of his fortune.

The issue went to trial in the spring of 1920 in the West Palm Beach Circuit Court. Both Mr. and Mrs. Croker came from Ireland to defend the case, which was further complicated by the fact that the invalid was unable to leave his sick room and go down stairs. He believed that the Irish Free State would be established securely and that Richard Croker would lead it to prosperity and that De Valera was looking backward and would fail.

"The Free State will succeed because it is in the hands of men who look forward," he said. "It will be a great thing for Ireland. The men who have been leaving and making a success wherever they went will now be able to remain here."

His physicians, Sir Thomas Miles and Dr. Edward Lennon, found that the primary cause of his trouble was not his old age, but that he was suffering from a disease which caused renewed apprehension among his friends, for the suffering was bound to tell on a man of his elderly years.

The surgeons decided not to run the risk of an operation, which would require an anesthetic. They thought as long ago as January, 1920, that Mr. Croker would never leave his room again.

Thought He Was Better. Mrs. Croker sent for her brother-in-law from Oklahoma to go to Ireland and take charge of the Glencliff estate, including the Glencliff Hotel. He was nine days' journey from Orby, Mr. Croker's daughter's winner of 1907. Thereafter Mr. Croker himself called several friends here, including John J. McLaughlin, president of the National Democratic Club, that he was getting better.

Mrs. Croker believed that the illness was indirectly the result of disorder in Ireland. She said that she was surprised Croker from landing at Queenstown. They had to go to Liverpool, thence to Holyhead. Arriving at Holyhead late at night, he was taken to a hotel. The wind for an hour while his baggage was examined. This exposure, added to the cold caught on shipboard, was too much for the Tammany patriarch.

John Whalen, who was Corporation Counsel under Mayor Van Wyck, received from Mrs. Croker a cable message similar to the one sent to Thomas F. McLaughlin. Whalen said he was surprised, as he knew that Mr. Croker was extremely ill and recently had lost much weight.

With a reputation for the highest integrity, his word could always be trusted. Lewis Nixon, who was Mr. Croker's immediate successor as leader of Tammany Hall, said that he was surprised and well shocked to learn of his friend's death, as he had thought that despite the old chieftain's age his vigorous constitution would carry him through the winter. He said that he had known Mr. Croker thirty-five years. It was Mr. Nixon whom Mr. Croker left in charge of Tammany when the veteran leader retired from the hall in 1907.

In May, 1902, Nixon's leadership ended by resignation and was replaced by that of the triumvirate—Charles F. Murphy, Louis F. Haffen and Daniel McMahon—described in those days by "The Bill Dexters" as "three spots and a jake." Murphy speedily emerged as the strong man of this combination and has been leader of Tammany ever since.

"I am awfully shocked," said the news of Mr. Croker's death, said Mr. Nixon. "I had the greatest respect for his political judgment, his ability and his integrity, and feel that his loss is that of a very dear friend."

"Great Genius for Organization." Sheriff Percival E. Nagle said: "I am probably one of the few left who served under the leadership of Richard Croker. At that time I was leader of the Thirty-fourth Election district and one of the youngest leaders serving under him. He was a great leader and was a genuine planning man. He was a rural born leader, and as I knew him his word was always as good as his bond."

James A. O'Gorman, former United States Senator, who was one of Mr. Croker's oldest political friends, recalled days when Croker and he were employed by the New York Railways Company. Croker was a mechanic. He said:

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